1: Ammar. E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

178 municipal or provincial government officials, and representing the village
622 in government affairs. The Omda of the village is elected on the basis of
642 his land property, and has been the symbol of authority and responsibility
[625] on behalf of the village. Now, with the establishment of a police station, with the availability of more people who can write out complaints, with the decrease of the wealth of the village Omda, and consequently with his inability to provide hospitality in the traditional way, or to represent the village properly without extending his hands for help from the village, his authority has been flouted and people tend to send their complaints and disputes directly to the police station or to the provincial authorities. They complain that the Omda is not what he used to be in the good old days, responsible for reception and accommodation of government officials, generous to chance travellers, or to the needy poor.[1] In a conversation between the writer and the Omda, the latter answered the villagers' allegations by saying 'If the Omda or any other man in his position would stick to what these people expect from his generosity, he would run the risk of complete bankruptcy'. The decrease of the headman's authority reveals itself in the local remarks such as 'We have an Omda without land', or expressing their dissatisfaction with regard to some unsettled disputes, the villagers would say 'It is a village without an Omda'.

[554] By the weakening of his position, the Omda has lost prestige and people compare him with his powerful and domineering predecessor 'during whose days no one could open his mouth' and 'no children could play about'. In fact, this brings us to the personal qualities of the present Omda who is actually a pleasant and genial personality. But the people think of authority as necessarily involving an assertion of power and domination. For the same reason people praised my informant Mahmoud when he was in office as head of the ghafeers. If one wields power, one must be powerful and forceful, the villagers say, otherwise one would not be respected and feared. Gibb and Bowen mentioned something similar to this attitude towards authority in the Arab provinces in the Ottoman Empire during the eighteenth century. Al-Jabarti wrote: 'If the peasants were administered by a compassionate multazim, they despised him and his agents, delayed payment of his taxes, called him by feminine names. . . .' The prevalence of such a conception of authority confers privilege and prerogatives and is enforced upon the minds of the people by long centuries of misrule and oppression, supplemented by the religious habits of stoicism, passing into fatalism.[2]

178 The weakening of the role of leadership in the village is one of the main
642 complaints that one quite often hears, either with regard to the prestige of the Omda, or with respect to the influence of the Arab councils or the relationship between the older and younger people. With disputes referred

[594] [1] The tradition of hospitality in the village leads to the fact that bread and milk cannot
[430] be sold on a commercial basis without bringing shame to the seller. This tradition still
[261] persists while that connected with selling of milk is less rigidly observed.
[2] H. A. R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 205.

MANURING

Watering is not enough; the soil needs nourishment to make it productive. The fellah knows only too well that the fertilising powers of the soil must be revived. Together with his wife and children he does his best to find, at as little expense as possible, as much animal or chemical manure as he can.

Pigeon droppings, silt cleaned out of canals and mixed with grass, and, above all, soil impregnated with stable-dung (*sebâkh bàladi*), (but never human excrement), village débris and age-old dust, all contribute nitrogen to his field. The rubbish mounds (*koms*) of dead cities become quarries to which the fellah turns for his manure. This *sebakh kufri*, as it is called, is found in varying qualities all over Egypt; but nowadays most of what is left is of poor quality.

In the cliffs of Upper Egypt there is also a kind of sand (*marog*) and a clay (*tafla*) which serve as a poor manure, and need much labour to bring to the fields. But all these manures are lacking in salt content. The used-up soil needs artificial remedies. Despite the fellah's hidebound methods his sympathy with the soil has helped him to understand its need. Since the early years of this century, good *sebâkh kufri* having become almost unobtainable, he has begun to use chemical manures (*semàd*). Before the present war (1939), Egypt used to import more than half a million tons of natural nitrates from Chile, the earliest known source, and synthetic nitrates from Germany and England. These may be used on all except leguminous crops (berseem, fenugreek, and beans), which need phosphates.

The distribution of *semàd* is most efficiently organised by the *Crédit Agricole d'Egypte*, which sells it by the sack on credit, and also by the Royal Agricultural Society and the big import firms. There are about 2,000 depots spread all over the country. The chief customers are the big landowners and the State Domains, which advance to the owners and tenant farmers the amount required for each holding against part of the crop. Before the war a sack of 100 kilograms, delivered to the village, used to cost from 65 to 70 piastres. Corn crops require the most expensive fertilisers, but the cheapest qualities are good enough for *berseem*.

427 511 Then he added, "Since everything we had has been taken from us, we will steal." (11)

The Fellah as Landowner

423 554 183 We have seen that more than two million fellaheen possess a patch of land each. Four fifths of this number own a plot so small — from two kirats to one feddan — as not to suffice a family for either employment or support. Nevertheless among the rural proletariat these small landowners are the 'privileged class'. It is every fellah's ideal to get land, as it is to marry, have children, and own a *gamoossa*.

183 651 452 The owner of a small field has the same things to buy as a tenant: seed, manure, animals and implements (these last usually in partnership with others). He has no rent to pay, but is liable for taxes, and usually interest on debts. The fellah is a poor hand at finance, and rarely has any savings; he borrows money to buy seed or fertilisers, to rent a neighbouring field which will round off his patch, or even, instead of paying off his debts, to buy it.

452 427 Since the banks do not lend small sums, he borrows from private persons, who, in spite of the 1912 Law limiting the maximum interest to 10%, lend him at 30% or even 50%. The interest, if not the debt itself, has to be paid. However hard he works, himself and all his family, in an effort to make his field produce its utmost with the least possible expenditure, he is almost always caught on the wrong leg when the payment falls due. Then he has to hand over all the fruits of his labour, or else sell part of his land.

There is a law (of December 3, 1912) which forbids seizure of the 'homestead', that is to say, five feddans or less. This law, by denying the banks any guarantee for their loans, has prevented smallholders from benefiting by the legal means of credit, and thrown them into the hands of moneylenders.

The fellah must have credit. As often as not, by his own fault, he does not know how to make his loans pay; the harsh terms engulf him deeper and deeper in debt, and the more he borrows the worse he fares. Land debts are like a cancer devouring the small landowner (12).

423 432 However, the fellah who owns land is, in name at least, owner of its products, especially of the cotton, which the

fellaheen of every other category see snatched from their hands; he can sell his few *cantars* of this precious crop for his own profit.

One feddan, on which he has spent about 30 piastres for seed, 100 piastres for chemical manure, and 70 piastres for taxes, irrigation, and petty expenses, may bring him in L.E. 10. If he is pressed for money the fellah sells his cotton at once to the money-lending merchant in his village, who takes advantage of the seller's need, of his ignorance of market fluctuations, and of the multitude of similar offers, to buy at the lowest price. If the fellah is more intelligent, he can take his cotton to the *halaqa*, or cotton market, of the neighbouring town. There, since 1912, weights and prices have been controlled by the Government, and buyers cannot trick the sellers.

When his need of money is less imperious, the small farmer does not sell his cotton immediately it is picked. He stores it in the *shoona* of a big landowner, a bank or a cotton firm, against an advance with which he can pay his most pressing debts. Offers to purchase are made at this store in piastres per *cantar*.

Sometimes the cotton is bought in advance; that is to say on sowing, the small farmer promises to deliver to so-and-so such-and-such a quantity of a given quality. The price is fixed either at the time, or on 'contract terms'. This means that it is based on a fixed minimum with a premium depending on the market value at Alexandria on whatever day suits the seller, provided that it be within the period agreed on at the time of contract.

Yet all these precautions intended to protect the smallholder cannot prevent him from being defrauded sadly often in the sale of his cotton, owing to his ignorance and individualism. It is the same with his other crops.

The *Crédit Agricole*, for example, makes advances on wheat, though only to small farmers, until they can sell their crops at the best price. So far so good. But the village middlemen can easily persuade the *omda* to give them certificates proving that they are also cultivators. They then buy corn at P.T. 120 an ardeb from the true fellaheen, who, not knowing where else to turn for money to pay their taxes, are glad to be able to sell. At the beginning of harvest this may seem a good bargain. But an *ardeb* is 175 kg.

in the village, while the *Crédit Agricole* takes it at only 150 kg. as in the cities, and advances 130 piastres (1937 prices) on each *ardeb*.

Your cunning merchant proceeds to deposit the wheat, which he pretends to have harvested, in the *shoonas* of the bank. He thus gains 10 piastres and 25 kilogrammes of wheat on each *ardeb* bought, and without assuming any risks himself can confidently expect an additional premium at the time of sale by the *Crédit Agricole*.

There are no walls but only low ridges or channels dividing the fields of Egypt. In the same way there is no sharp division between the various kinds of labour which we have just been analysing. None of these categories is self-sufficient, and each overlaps the next. There are few fellaheen who do not pass from one to another, or belong at the same time to two of them. The very conditions of the fellah's life imply a certain similarity in them all.

(1) *Poverty*. Because he knows nothing of either foresight or economy, and even more because he is weak, isolated and ignorant, the strong and the rich reap the fruits of his labours. The bank or the moneylender, the Government, the *omda*, or the landowner, gathers in most, if not all, of what he has sweated to produce. He himself, to use one of his own sayings, remains "poor as a needle, which clothes others but itself remains unclad".

(2) *Dependence*. The fellah can plant neither what he wishes nor when he wishes. As a day-labourer he works in a gang at a definite task under the strictest supervision. As tenant farmer or share-cropper he plants his crops according to the owner's plan. As landowner he is dependent with regard to dates and choice of crops on the orders of the Ministry of Agriculture. He has no sort of liberty or initiative one way or the other.

(3) *The minimum standard*. However bad his affairs may be, the fellah is at least certain of his daily bread. No-one actually starves to death in the country; for even under the worst conditions of labour the natural resources of the land remain.

(4) *Family Labour*. The help given to the fellah by his family must never be lost sight of. Among the Egyptian peasantry, wife, children, *gamoossa* and donkey make up

527 Sometimes, as at Shemm el Nessim[44], the feast of Spring, the faithful of both religions mingle in the same holiday and the same rejoicings. The ceremonies may last several days. Formless processions pass, with banners floating in the wind. Arabs come to show off their horsemanship; swings and roundabouts are set up for the chil-
[443] dren. A thousand booths are arranged in the open air, for the sale of sugar dolls, sweet sesame, roast peas and monkey nuts[45]. The crowd laughs, sings, and makes merry, spending in a single day the savings of a whole year and living only for the moment.

443 At the market too there is a crowd. The market is a
437 piece of waste land, sometimes enclosed, outside the bigger villages. The Egyptian Markets Company has established 123 country markets, which may be recognised by their iron railings, in such towns as Mehalla, Embaba, and Tahta. They take a toll of one or two piastres from each seller.

The market is usually held once a week and lasts from dawn to midday. The sellers, men and women, make their way to it at daybreak in long files, choose a spot to lay out their wares, and squat down behind them to wait for customers. Buyers soon appear from all the surrounding villages, and then all is a noisy, confused mêlée of men, cattle and goods.

Piece-goods and hardware are sold by professional merchants who come from the chief town or are going the round of the villages. These merchants get their stock from the wholesalers in the cities. But vegetables, poultry, butter and eggs are sold by the fellah himself, or rather by the fellah's wife, who is a better hand at bargaining. When forced to do so, the fellah brings his *gamoossa* or goat to the market for sale.

432 The buyers are other fellaheen who need manufactured
435 goods or foodstuffs which they cannot produce themselves. For two piastres they can replace a broken waterpot (*ballas*) or a worn-out basket. Eight piastres will buy a big pair of drawers, and five a shirt. A *gallabiya* may be had for twenty piastres, and for thirty a *milaya*, or woman's veil. Better qualities are on sale for the *'omda* or for a villager who has done good business. A *gallabiya* or a *milaya* worth 100 piastres — that is something for a man or woman to be proud of.

 [No.(54).- Analyst]

Provisions also have to be bought, according to need, opportunity and means. Here are a few prices, the first column representing pre-war prices, the second those of 1943.

Meat	Pre-war	1943
Beef, per oke	P.T. 8	P.T. 20
Mutton, „ „	„ 12	„ 30
Kerosene for lamps or stove		
18-litre tin	P.T. 10-11	P.T. 20
1 litre	7 mills.	12 mills.
Cotton-seed oil for cooking, per oke	P.T. 6-	P.T. 10
Tea, per oke	„ 25	„ 80
Sugar, per oke	„ 3 1/8	„ 6
Coffee, per rotl	„ 5	„ 11
Cigarettes, per box of 20	„ 2 or 3	„ 4

Farm produce is bought by the local *bourgeois* or by agents, who send it elsewhere. Prices in the village market run as follows :—

	Pre-war	1943
Chickens, per pair	P.T. 8–15	P.T. 40
Eggs, per dozen	„ 1 1/2– 3	„ 5
Clarified butter (*samn*), per oke	„ 12–16	„ 36
Rice, per oke	„ 2– 3	„ 3 1/8
Lentils, per oke	„ 2– 3	„ 5

Cereals and cotton are bought up by middlemen, or by agents of the big firms in Cairo and Alexandria. The prices vary a good deal. A *cantar* of cotton may sell at 300-550 piastres, according to the quality of the staple, the rate of exchange, or the impatience of the fellah. The small merchant buys a *rotl* of cotton from the gleaners for 7 milliemes, and sells a *cantar* at 252 piastres. An *ardeb* of corn (about 150 kilograms) will sell for 110-140 piastres, the price varying as before with the quality and quantity. For other goods the variation is less. The prices are lower or higher according to the distance of the market from the Nile, the season of the year and the fluctuations of supply and demand. For some classes of goods the price has hardly changed for thirty years. It still sometimes happens in the villages that more than one fourth of the business is done by barter, but the use of money is becoming more and more the rule.